

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMM

S E C R E T STATE 080337

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, IS

SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION: NEXT STEPS

1. THE BASIC THRUST OF OUR POSITION IS TO OBTAIN A STAND-STILL, TRUCE, OR CEASE-FIRE--WHATEVER THE NAME OR UNDER WHATEVER AUSPICES--WHICH WOULD KEEP THE PALESTINIANS FROM ADVANCING ANY FURTHER. OTHERWISE, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE SEEN NO INDICATIONS SO FAR THAT THEY ARE CONTEMPLATING SUCH ACTION, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE ISRAELIS WILL REACT MORE DIRECTLY IN DEFENSE OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE AREA. ANY SUCH ISRAELI MOVE MIGHT SERIOUSLY COMPLICATE THE EXISTING

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PROBLEM AND ADD NEW ONES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY.

2. FOR AMBASSADOR MURPHY: PLEASE THEREFORE STRENGTHEN YOUR PRESENTATION TO ASAD OR OTHER SYRIAN OFFICIALS WITH WHOM YOU WILL BE DISCUSSING THE SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION, SUPPLEMENTING YOUR PREVIOUS GUIDANCE WITH THE FOLLOWING

MAJOR POINTS:

-- WE ARE CONCERNED THAT, IF THE PALESTINIANS CONTINUE TO PUSH MILITARILY AGAINST THE KEY CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES, WE MAY NOT, DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS, BE ABLE TO PREVAIL ON

ISRAELIS NOT TO RESPOND IF THEY RECEIVE CHRISTIAN APPEAL FOR HELP.

-- UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE ARE CONVINCED THAT ALL GOVERNMENTS WITH INFLUENCE ON THE FACTIONS INVOLVED IN THE PRESENT FIGHTING SHOULD DO THEIR BEST TO KEEP MATTERS FROM GETTING OUT OF CONTROL AND TO WORK FOR A TRUCE. WE FOR OUR PART HAVE URGED RESTRAINT ON THE ISRAELIS AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS. OUR AMBASSADOR IN BEIRUT ALSO HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH CERTAIN CHRISTIAN LEADERS, IN ADDITION TO THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, TO ENCOURAGE A STANDSTILL OR TRUCE.

-- WE CAN APPRECIATE HOW ISRAELI COOPERATION WITH THE INHABITANTS OF THE AREA IS PERCEIVED BY SYRIA. FOR OUR PART, WE HAVE BEEN CONCERNED THAT THE RECENT MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTH MIGHT ADD NEW COMPLICATIONS AND, JUST PRIOR TO THE LATEST HEAVY FIGHTING, HAD BEEN CONSULTING WITH VARIOUS INTERESTED QUARTERS. THE POINT IS THAT THERE IS NOW A NEW SITUATION, AND NEW RISKS.

-- THE PALESTINIANS APPEAR TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND MILITARILY, AND THE KEY QUESTION IS WHETHER THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO STOP WHERE THEY ARE NOW AND AGREE TO A STAND-
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STILL. WE HOPE THAT SYRIA WILL PARALLEL THE EFFORTS WE ARE MAKING AND USE ITS INFLUENCE WITH THE PALESTINIANS, THEREBY GIVING SARKIS SOME TIME TO EXTEND HIS AUTHORITY TO THE AREA.
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